

Opinion

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Opinion and Commentary Editor: Steve Lund | (262) 656-6283 | slund@kenosha-news.com

Battling a silent killer

Local legislators lead effort to require carbon monoxide detectors

OUR VIEW

It's not often that State Rep. Samantha Kerkman, R-Randall, and State Sen. Bob Wirch, D-Pleasant Prairie, are on the same side of an issue, but they are both on the same page when it comes to carbon monoxide detectors.

Wirch introduced Senate Bill 289 and Kerkman is the first co-sponsor listed. The bill would require public buildings used for sleeping or lodging purposes to install carbon monoxide detectors. The buildings affected would include apartment buildings, rooming houses, hotels, community-based residential facilities and dormitories.

This legislation could save lives. Carbon monoxide is called the silent killer, since it is invisible and odorless. If people are sleeping in a room where the concentration of

carbon monoxide gets too high, they often die before they realize anything is wrong.

If furnaces or other heating units are in good operating condition and are vented properly, there should be no problems with carbon monoxide. But people in hotels or rooming houses or dormitories can't always tell if the furnaces are in good condition and they certainly can't tell if the heaters are vented properly. A device that sounds an alarm if the concentration of carbon monoxide in the air becomes dangerous could save people from potentially deadly situations.

The legislation would impose some costs on the owners of buildings that are affected.

Carbon monoxide detectors are available for about \$20, but there are also more expensive ones. The cost is acceptable for the benefit, in our view. If the bill passes, it will focus more public attention on the issue, which might prompt homeowners who are not affected by the bill, to also obtain carbon monoxide detectors.

During the six-year period from 1999 through 2004, 79 people in Wisconsin died of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Among them were Frank and Kate Hekemberger, Salem residents who died while staying at a resort in Chetek.

Members of the Hekemberger family have been active in urging the Legislature to pass this bill. We commend their efforts and those of Rep. Kerkman and Sen. Wirch. The bill deserves to pass.



State Representative

Samantha J. Kerkman

**Testimony of Rep. Samantha Kerkman
Consumer Protection & Personal Privacy Committee
Senate Bill 289 - Installation of Carbon Monoxide Detectors
February 21, 2008**

We've all heard the tragic stories of individuals being overcome by carbon monoxide. We've heard the stories in the paper or saw the reports on TV...but today we can put a face to those stories. The Hekenberger family lost their parents, their children's grandparents, and friends to many, while they vacationed at a cabin in Wisconsin. There is nothing worse than when a tragedy is needed to fuel change. Unfortunately, that is exactly why we are here today.

Senate Bill 289 requires the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in residential buildings. Although not necessarily a perfect product, this legislation is an excellent starting point for change. Requiring installation of carbon monoxide detectors will ensure that another family doesn't lose a loved one.

Due to the far reaching impact of the bill, it was critical that we do all that we can to ensure that the legislation is workable. Thus, this legislation represents the tireless work of so many individuals. It will require significant changes for many, and as legislators we needed to make sure the product before you was reasonable and not cost prohibitive. It is my hope that Senate Bill 289 will ensure the safety of individuals without creating a burden that will negatively impact business in our state.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is preventable -that is the ultimate tragedy here today. Thank you for the committee's consideration of Senate Bill 289.



Serving the
Lodging Industry
for Over 100 Years

February 21, 2008

To: Assembly Committee on Consumer Protection and Personal
Privacy
Representative Thomas Lothian, Chairman
From: Trisha Pugal, President, CEO
RE: SB 289 Carbon Monoxide Detector Requirements

The Wisconsin Innkeepers Association (WIA) is a non-profit trade association representing over 1,000 hotels, motels, resorts, inns, and bed & breakfasts throughout the state.

At the invitation of the bill sponsors of SB 289, we have met with interested parties in negotiating possible requirements for carbon monoxide detectors at lodging properties and other "residential buildings".

The vast majority of occurrences of carbon monoxide poisoning in our state do not occur at lodging properties. In fact we are aware of one fatality occurrence in our state to date, (involving two individuals in 2002) compared to multiple occurrences at other types of facilities or residences. However, with our ongoing interest in the safety of our guests, we have agreed to support requirements deemed to be reasonable in light of both the data on our industry as well as reasonable projections for future concerns.

SB 289, as amended by the Senate with Amendment 1, is a compromise that we feel goes beyond the projected safety needs of lodging guests, however as the requirements included would have been more than sufficient to prevent the fatalities that occurred in 2002, we have agreed to support SB 289 as amended.

CC: WIA Executive Committee
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